

**LEBBEUS WOODS
FREESPACE PROJECTS**

Storefront for Art and Architecture

April 23 - May 22, 1994

It is good to have an exhibition in New York after a hiatus of six years, during which time there have been so many developments in my work. It is also good to return to the Storefront, the site of my last exhibition here of the architectural cycle 'Centricity.' That cycle, completed in 1987, concluded ten years of speculation on the possibilities of architecture forming within the workings of time as a continually evolving idea and form. After that project, I turned away from determinism and its promises of unity altogether. Under the influence of ideas of indeterminacy that seem to have an increasing relevance for contemporary culture, I initiated a number of projects that explored the implications of these ideas for architecture. The present exhibition may therefore be seen as a pendant to the earlier one, though not as a contradiction to it. Any close observer of Centricity will find an architecture of indeterminacy already within its embracing folds. While I no longer believe in the possibility of the ordering power of cyclical time, I accept that indeterminacy may itself be nothing more than a stage of understanding leading to a new level of comprehensiveness. Such are the paradoxes that haunt the contemporary world, and form the basis of the freespace projects.

[Following are excerpts from published articles that are relevant to the work shown in this exhibition]:

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Excerpts from **WAR AND ARCHITECTURE**, written 27 June 1993 (published by Princeton Architectural Press as *Pamphlet Architecture 15*, 1993 and published in *Architecture and Urbanism (A+U)*, Tokyo, October 1993 issue, as 'WAR AND ARCHITECTURE: Meditations and Principles'):

MANIFESTO

Architecture and war are not incompatible. Architecture is war. War is architecture.

I am at war with my time, with history, with all authority that resides
in fixed and frightened forms.

*I am one of millions who do not fit in, who have no home, no family, no doctrine,
no firm place to call my own, no known beginning or end,
no "sacred and primordial site."*

*I declare war on all icons and finalities, on all histories that would chain me
with my own falseness, my own pitiful fears.*

*I know only moments, and lifetimes that are as moments, and forms that appear
with infinite strength, then "melt into air."*

*I am an architect, a constructor of worlds, a sensualist who worships the flesh,
the melody, a silhouette against the darkening sky.*

I cannot know your name. Nor can you know mine.

Tomorrow, we begin together the construction of a city.

Architecture
as an
ideological
war on
construction of
society. Not
of environment
which most of
modernists &
modernists have
been about.

This article is dedicated to the citizens of Sarajevo, who at this writing are still under a viscous and pathological siege that began more than fourteen months ago. It is my hope that ideas worked out at a distance will nevertheless have immediacy for them, and in some way contribute---when the time comes---to the rebuilding of their city and way of life.

The towers are burned now in Sarajevo. The steel and glass monuments to enlightened progress in an age of industrial society are gutted hulks, and with them the ideologies and values they embodied. Sarajevo's skyscrapers were prime targets of gunners in the hills, together with minarets and domed mosques, the great library, the post-office, the university buildings and all others that symbolized reason and its promise of humane civil life. Once set afire by the incendiary shells, there was no way to save them. Not only had the infrastructure with which to do so been destroyed, but also the delicate tissue of reasons to do so. The burning towers of Sarajevo are markers at the end of an age of reasons, if not of reason itself, beyond which lies a domain of almost incomprehensible darkness.

Construction is
guided to
destroy physicality
of a culture,
as the infrastructure
of society.
Stripping of people
with culture.

But war is not confined to this city, nor to the culturally complex Balkan peninsula for which Sarajevo was a symbol of tolerance and hope, and is now a signal of despair, and a warning. Armed conflict in one guise or another rages around the world, in Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia, in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Sri Lanka, In Israel and Lebanon, in Angola and half a dozen other African states, in Northern Ireland, Peru and Colombia. South Central Los Angeles was the zone of a civil insurrection that passed through it like a sudden and virulent storm, leaving behind not only massive destruction to property, but also to illusions of America's immunity to the violent forces of change affecting others. In Germany, the firebombing of buildings housing guest-workers has led to riots that expose once again the fragility of civilization in even the most orderly of societies. Though no one in their right mind would wish it, there is certainly more to come, as the human world continues to fragment in the thaw following the Cold War, cracking like a great monolithic ice sheet along new and sometimes unexpected lines. It is a depressing and frightening picture to draw, especially at the end of a century in which hot wars have taught unforgettable lessons about the madness of organized violence. But it is a picture that emerges of its own cruel strength, its disturbing but potentially healing necessity. Only in confronting it can there be any hope of changing its tragic content. Only by facing the insanity of willful destruction can reason begin to believe again in itself.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Is the knowledge on which people base their actions *objective*, concerning a reality independent of *subjective* human cognitive processes? Yes, according to principles of classical science: Plato's Idea, Descartes' duality, and Newton's mechanics. Also, Einstein's classical causality. This is a reality in which authority resides in *hierarchies* and in the static equilibriums of rational determinism.

Or, Is knowledge *existential*? Does it concern a world in which existence precedes essence, in which knowledge cannot be verified by the assumption of a reality external to the processes of human cognition? Yes, according to principles of quantum theory (matrix mechanics, Copenhagen Interpretation) and cybernetics (recursive, closed systems). This is a reality in which authority moves within the shifting, dynamical fields of the self-determining, self-organizing systems known as *heterarchies*. Deleuze's nomads and flows. According to these principles, absolute and relative, objective and subjective, have no meaning.

Which set of principles is true? As any good (amoral) scientist would say, the one that works the best. As any good (moral) existentialist would demand, the one confirmed by experience.

ARCHITECTURE AS AN EMBODIMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

The making of architecture is a major coalescing activity in society, bringing together many flows into a single complex stream. In classical terms, architecture is a socially significant synthesis of the old antitheses: public/private, art/science, capital/labor. As long as society is dominated by institutions of authority which require a basis external to themselves for their existence (divine right of kings, social contract), monumental, i.e., institutional, hierarchical architecture is required to embody objective knowledge. Subjective knowledge is relevant only within the personal sphere, therefore is embodied in idiosyncratic private works, tolerated publicly as works of art. But when society can no longer define itself in classically deterministic, objective terms, but only in terms of continuously shifting, fluid-dynamical fields of activity, then architecture must forsake the monumental, because there is no hierarchy to valorize anymore, no fixed authority or its body of knowledge external to human experience to codify. In such a society, the classical distinction between art and life disappears. Art and life flow together, inseparable. Architecture then concerns itself with fluid-dynamic structures: tissues, networks, matrices, heterarchies. Both social structures exist within the present one: the fixed and the fluid, the hierarchical and heterarchical. The one that works, the one confirmed by experience depends on point of view. For many today the heterarchical offers the best chance to realize the potential of the human. To a religious fundamentalist, the very opposite is true. One difference exists, however---the two points of view are not equivalent or interchangeable. The heterarchical of necessity embraces the hierarchical, but the hierarchical cannot, of necessity, embrace the heterarchical, and will suppress it by any means, including intentional violence and war.

BUILDING ON THE EXISTENTIAL REMNANTS OF WAR

Wherever buildings are broken by the explosion of bombs or artillery shells, by fire or structural collapse, their form must be respected as an integrity, embodying a history that must not be denied. In their damaged state they suggest new forms of thought and comprehension, and suggest new conceptions of space that confirm the potential of the human to integrate itself, to be whole and free outside of any pre-determined, totalizing system. The new spaces of habitation constructed on the existential remnants of war do not celebrate the destruction of an established order, nor do they symbolize or commemorate it. Rather they accept with a certain pride what has been suffered and lost, but also what has been gained. They build upon the shattered form of the old order a new category of order inherent only in present conditions, within which existence feels its strengths, acknowledges its vulnerabilities and failures, faces up to the need to invent itself as though for the first time, thus seizing the means to continuously refresh and revitalize itself. There is an ethical and moral commitment in such an existence, and therefore a basis for community.

PATTERNS OF CHOICE AND INVENTION

The destruction of old cities has shattered their overlaid patterns of spatial and conceptual order. Once the existing patterns have been reduced by violence to a single, degraded pattern, they cannot be restored or replaced in any single step. However, there exists within this degraded layer of urban fabric another, more intimate scale of complexity that can serve as the point of origin for a new urban fabric.

Ragged tears in walls, roofs and floor structures created by explosions and fires are unique and complex forms and figurations, unique in their history and meaning. No two are alike, yet they all share a common aspect: they have resulted from the unpredictable effects of forces released in the calculated risks of war. They are the beginnings of new ways of thinking, living and shaping space, arising from individuality and invention. From them a heterarchical community can be formed, one that precludes the hierarchical basis for organized violence and war.

INJECTIONS

In the spaces voided by destruction, new structures are inserted. Complete in themselves, they do not make an exact fit, but exist as spaces within spaces, making no attempt to reconcile the gaps between what is new and old, between two radically different systems of spatial order and of thought. These gaps can only be filled in time. The new structures contain *freespaces*, the forms of which do not invite occupation with the old paraphernalia of living, the old ways of living and thinking. They are, in fact, difficult to occupy, and require inventiveness in everyday living in order to become habitable. They are not pre-designed, pre-determined, predictable and predictive. They assert no control over the thought and behavior of people by conforming to typologies and coercive programs of use, to pre-established ideologies and their plans to predominate in human activities under the name of an enforced unity of meaning and *materiel*. Rather they offer a dense matrix of new conditions, as an armature for living as fully as possible in the present, for living *experimentally*. The freespaces are, at their inception, useless and meaningless spaces. They become useful, acquire meaning, only as they are inhabited by particular people. Traditional links with centralized authority, with deterministic and coercive systems are disrupted. People assume the benefits and burdens of self-organization. Existence continuously begins again, by the reinvention of itself.

THE SCAB

A first layer of construction, shielding an exposed interior space or void, protecting it during its transformation. Scab is an ugly word. It would be comforting to find pleasant metaphors to

describe the processes of building on the remnants of war, but they would betray the character of the work to be done, and the reasons for doing it. The natural stages of healing may not be pretty, judged by conventional aesthetic standards, but they are beautiful in the existential sense. As art and life become one, the need to disguise the actual diminishes, until the actual not only appears beautiful, but is. This is not only because whatever exists acquires new meaning and value, but also because whatever exists suffers an actual transformation, because it becomes the subject of the most concentrated human effort. Architecture, the very model of precision and self-exalting intelligence, should not fear its union with what has been the lowest form of human manifestation, the ugly evidence of violence. Architecture must learn to transform the violence, even as the violence knows how to transform the architecture.

SOLID STATE, FLUID STATE

In the regeneration of urban life and its built fabric after war, the separate freespaces remain linked by the old city's fixed network of streets and buildings, disrupted and reduced though they might be. Heterarchies subsume hierarchies, just as the world of orthogonal order and all its neo-platonic, Cartesian assumptions is latent in the freer geometries of natural forms, the unpredicted geometries produced in buildings by war, or the existential geometries of the freespace structures themselves. But the refiguration and re-inhabitation of space is today only one dimension of an extended and ever-expanding human condition. The other exists in the tangible but highly fluid domain of electronics and the instruments of a new, information age. The flow of information between people on a communal scale bears a conceptual resemblance to the remnants of war in the old city: it is rational in its intentions, but unpredictable in its effects. Freespaces contain electronic instrumentation extending human faculties to experience, think and act, including the tools of play, which are essential to experimental living.

THE SCAR is a deep level of construction that fuses the new and the old, reconciling, coalescing them, without compromising either one in the name of a contextual or other form of unity. The scar is a mark of pride, and of honor, both for what has been lost and what has been gained. It cannot be erased, except by the most cosmetic means. It cannot be elevated beyond what it is, a mutant tissue, the precursor of unpredictable regenerations.

Acceptance of the scar is an acceptance of existence. Healing is not an illusory, cosmetic process, but something which---by articulating differences---both deeply divides and joins together. The new forms of knowledge, those which give greatest weight to individual cognition and not to abstractions representing the authority of power external to experience, mandate a society founded on differences between people and things, not similarities. The city of self-responsible people, of individuals---each of whom tells a personal (even private) story---

exhibits its unique scars, its transformations in solitude, which are a new kind of history. Increasingly, these will be stories of resourcefulness and invention, more and more distant from conditions created by conformity to social norms.

WHO INHABITS FREESPACES?

People from every social class---whoever has the desire or necessity to transform their everyday patterns of life from the fixed to the fluid, from the deterministic to the existential. For the most part, it will be people who find the old, hierarchical orders too uncomfortable, too oppressive, too unworkable to stay within their dictates of custom or law, and are driven---from within or without--to take their lives more fully into their own hands. They will be the people of crisis: the crisis of knowledge, the crisis of geography, the crisis of conscience. They are the ones who must perpetually begin again.

WHO OWNS FREESPACES?

Those who make them their own. Those whose lives, day to day, consecrate space with their own densities of meaning. This should not be mistaken for an ethic of "survival of the fittest," but understood as a form of comradeship, or compassion. Those who can conceive or construct space place it freely in the common domain. They, themselves, may occupy space, or leave it to others---their reward is in the making. For those who occupy freespace, it is something else---action transforming itself over time. A space that has been abandoned, for whatever reason, reverts to the common domain. There is justice in this, and the reality of an ever-renewable beginning.

WHO PAYS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF FREESPACES?

Certainly not the banks, the corporations, the governments, the institutions of culture under whose authority the spaces of human habitation have everywhere been coerced into (for them) a convenient conformity, and reduced to the degradation of violence in the name of false unities and security. Money will not pay for freespaces, because it is not available to those who by necessity are independent of its sources. The barter system must, in the beginning, suffice. The use of salvage provokes a new ingenuity. The idiosyncratic shaping of new materials, the same. Eventually it may be possible to create a new form of currency: *information*. Exchanged in bytes or bits, it becomes more valuable than gold. Freespaces are financed from *below*, by those whose knowledge and ingenuity, energy and inventiveness have always fueled the engines of civilization, but who do so now, directly and resolutely, for themselves.